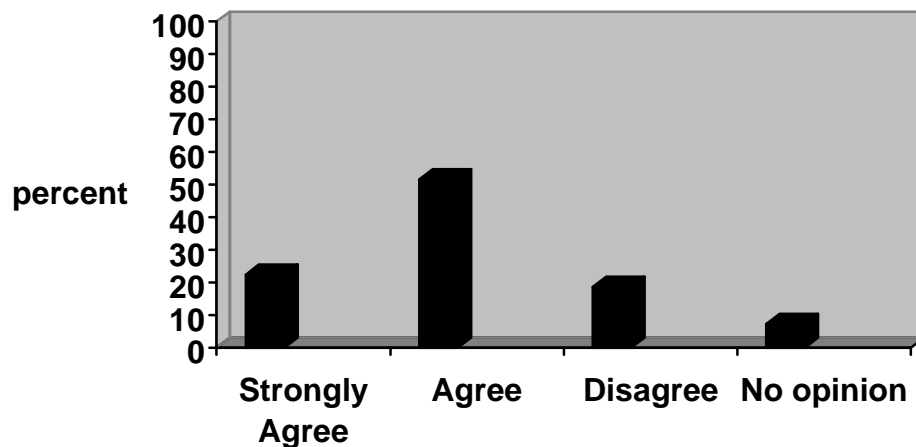


Figure 7 depicts the notion that today's youthful offenders are more likely to commit criminal activity as part of a collective group than they were five years earlier. Approximately three-fourths of those who responded to the survey acknowledged that they perceived more group criminality today when contrasted with five years ago.

Figure 7. Today's Typical Offender is More Likely to Offend as Part of a Group than the Typical Offender of Five Years Ago



Arrest statistics, which are more of a measure of system activity and less of a measure of the total number of true crime incidents, partially confirm the validity of the respondents' perceptions concerning drug activity. Drug arrests of teens, under the age of 18, grew 40.8 percent during the period of 1994-1998. However these statistics indicate a decline of 5.8 percent in violent crime arrests and a decline of 1.7 percent in weapon related offenses for these offenders during this period (North Carolina Department of Justice, 1999). Data from the United States Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1999) suggest that the proportion of juvenile crime committed in groups has not changed appreciably during the past 24 years. While some of these data are crude proxy measures for measuring the real aggregate amount of criminal activity they do demonstrate the discrepancies which can occur between the reality of youth crime and the perceptions of youth crime.

Respondents also expressed their agreement with the assumption that drugs and weapons were driving the increases in youth violence within their communities. However the percentage who either agreed, or strongly disagreed, that these offenses were the primary causal factors for increasing youth violence was not as pronounced as the popular press and media would lead one to belief. Sixty-five percent agreed, or strongly